

"SOCIAL EQUALITY"

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A STRANGER to American institutions would be curiously impressed by the separate and distinct social areas which the two races occupy. Here are two peoples, domiciled in the same territory, invested with equal civil and political rights, speaking the same language, loyal to the same institutions, worshipping God after the same ritual, and linked together in a common destiny; and yet in all purely personal and pleasurable intercourse, they are as far apart as if separated by interstellar space. "Social equality," is the shibboleth which divides the races asunder. This slogan, like a savage warwhoop, arouses the deepest venom of race, which slumbers only skin deep beneath a thin veneer of civilization. This expression cannot be defined according to the ordinary import and weight of words. Whoever coined it possessed a genius for summoning the evil spirit. The term has no exact lexical status, but it is surcharged with idiomatic meaning. We can no more determine its potency and power from the component words than we can judge the emblematic significance of "Old Glory" by the fabric and dye stuff that enter into its composition. As the sight of the flag evokes the patriotic zeal of the loyal beholder, or as the soldier makes frantic response to the alarum "to arms," so the tocsin, "social equality," arouses the pride of class and wrath of race. "Social" and "equality" are two excellent, elegant words; but "social equality" must not be pronounced in good society, like two harmless chemical elements uniting to make a dangerous compound. This phrase has unbounded potency over the passion of the white man of the South. He religiously obeys its behest, at whatever sacrifice or cost of conscience.

He bows down and worships before a verbal idol with fear and trembling, as a heathen before his graven God. The sanction of its decree is more binding than that of legal code, religious creed, or the claims of humanity. Pope has given a poetic setting to the moral conviction of mankind that conscience is the rightful arbiter of conduct:

"What conscience dictates to be done,
Or warns me not to do;
This teach me more than hell to shun,
That more than heaven pursue."

If in this elegant quatrain we substitute "social equality" for conscience, although we mar the meter, it adapts the meaning to the social creed of the South. The interpretation which that section places upon "social equality" constitutes the crux of the race problem, and conditions all modes of rights, privileges and opportunity, whether they be political, civil, educational or industrial. By reason of its exactions, the negro is not desired by the white man to vote for the same candidate, work at the same handicraft, enjoy the same public and civic privileges, to worship at the same shrine, or to be buried in the same graveyard. It is indeed the ruling passion strong in death. Race prejudice which this phrase evokes is not amenable to the formulas of logic; it is impatient of fact, and intolerant of argument and demonstration. It does not reason, it asserts and asservates. Its traditional method is a word and a blow.

At one time it was the avowed policy of the dominant South to furnish the negro equal public opportunity with the whites, while insisting on the separation of the races in all purely social features. This was the gospel according to the late Henry W. Grady, who, before his untimely death, bid fair to become not

only the mouth-piece but the oracle of the New South. Senator D. M. McEnery of Louisiana, in a notable speech in the United States senate several years ago, said: "There never has been any disposition on the part of the people of Louisiana to deprive the negro of his political and civil rights. There has been and will continue to be a determination, fixed and unalterable, to deny him social privilege on equality with the whites, and to prohibit him from aspiring to any equality in social life, which nature forbids." Passing by the gracious proffer to assist nature in carrying out her inexorable decree, this deliverance shows plainly that the social policy of the South is regarded as the primary factor, and political and civil regulations are but corollaries of the leading proposition. In society as in science, the greater includes the less.

But of late we have heard a new voice from the South. It is louder and less considerate of the claims of humanity than the milder tones of the more dignified and decorous leadership which it seeks to supplant. This is the voice of Tillman and Vardaman and Baringer and Thomas Dixon. These new oracles tell us that the negro must be denied political, civil, educational and even industrial opportunity, lest "social equality" should be the consummation of it all. The Ten Commandments, the Golden Rule, the Sermon on the Mount, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, and the genius and tradition of American institutions are held in open defiance by a narrow and provincial spirit. The ethical and political foundations of social order are ruthlessly overborne by the fiat of a silly phrase. The question is of vital concern to every loyal American citizen. For if this spirit is allowed to prevail, and the negro is, of set policy, suppressed below the level of American manhood, in deference to an absurd social theory,

then his statue will inevitably settle into a servile caste as rigid and inexorable as that which blights oriental civilization. The enlightened patriotism that rose up in righteous wrath against human slavery cannot view with composure the establishment on American soil of an iniquitous caste, which is even more repugnant to the genius of free institutions. The silent South, the survivors and descendants of the better type of the slaveholding class, the men and women in whose breasts even the blighting influence of slavery could not sour the milk of human kindness, are now held, as in a vise, by this narrow and intolerant spirit. They have no frantic dread of the social affiliation of the races. Indeed, according to their traditional social code, intimate personal association with the uncouth and uncultivated whites is almost as distasteful a contemplation. And yet the cry of social equality has been so persistently and boisterously dinned in their ears, that an imaginary evil has assumed the semblance of a real danger. This voice has been hushed; they have become tongue-tied, and are as completely divested of freedom, either of action or utterance, as the poor negro who bears the brunt of it all. If liberal-minded southern white men, like George W. Cable, or John Spencer Bassett, or Andrew Sledd, though still yielding allegiance to the prevailing social dogma, dare lift their voice, even in faintest whisper, in protest against the evil perpetrated in its name, they are forthwith lashed into silence by popular fury and scorn. Race hatred is the most malignant poison that can afflict the mind. It chills the higher faculties of the soul. The restiveness of the high-souled sons of the South under restriction imposed by the less enlightened of their own race is the only hopeful rift that we can see in the dark and lowering cloud.

Every system of oppression seeks to justify itself. The institutions of slavery

ransacked science, history, literature and religion in quest of fact and argument to uphold the iniquitous system. There is almost an exact parallel between the methods employed in support of human slavery and those that are now being resorted to in justification of the decrees of "social equality."

We are told that the separation of the races is ordained of God, just as slavery used to be called a "divine institution." It is strange indeed that those who breath out hatred and slaughter against their fellow men are ever prone to claim divine prerogative in carrying out their iniquitous scheme. The alliance of Providence with the type of men who are now leading the propaganda of race hatred would reverse all of our received notions of the divine attributes.

Physical dissimilarity is siezed upon as a badge of distinction, and a hasty judgment easily confuses the index with the indicated potency. But, as is well known, difference of race and color has never prevented the closest intimacy of personal association. The gentleman who drives to the station "cheek by jowl" with his black coachman, but who becomes furious on being made joint occupant with a black seat-fellow in a railway coach, is actuated by an impulse other than purely physical repugnance. If race friction rested solely upon physical basis, we should expect its rigor to be uniform wherever such distinctions prevail. But, as a matter of fact, we find that it is subject to the widest latitude of variability, and is almost indefinitely modifiable by circumstances and conditions. It presents little of the fixity and inflexible character of natural law. The Teuton manifests it in a different degree from the Latin races, with whom ethnic peculiarities count for little or nothing against moral and spiritual homogeneity. Rio de Janeiro and Richmond, Virginia, are typical illustrations of the two spirits as respects the entente of dissimilar races.

Prejudice is more pronounced, or at least assumes a different aspect, in the southern than in the northern state, being stimulated by the relative number and erstwhile status of the two elements. It becomes mild or virulent, according to incentive or occasion. In individual instances, it almost or wholly disappears, and can be aroused only by playing upon his class interests, prejudice and pride. Grant Allen tells us somewhere that the same Englishman who seems to ignore race differences at home, becomes the most intolerant of men when he takes residence in the colonies. If the separation of the races is a decree of providence working through nature, what need of human help in carrying out that decree? The reenactment of the laws of the Almighty leads naturally to the conviction that those who so eagerly proffer this assistance are actuated by a wish rather than a conviction. The negro is not credited with natural repugnance against associating with white men. The charge that they must be restricted in their eagerness for such association is the highest possible unwitting proof that the aversion between the races cannot be wholly accounted for by natural antipathy. The lion and the lamb do not enjoy a common bed, because such social intimacy is doubtless as distasteful to the lamb as to the lion. Natural antipathy is a reciprocal feeling.

The attempt to base the separation of the races upon psychological grounds is equally void of substantiation. There is no clearly discernible psychological difference. No reputable authority has yet pointed out any sharply defined psychic discriminant. The mind of the negro is of the same nature as that of the white man, and responds to the same nurture. There is not a single intellectual, moral or spiritual excellence achieved by the white race to which the negro mind does not yield an appreciative response. If it could be shown that the negro was incapable of mastering

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the intricacies of Aryan speech, that he could not possibly comprehend the intellectual basis of modern culture, that he could not be made amenable to the white man's ethical standards or feel his spiritual motive, there would be need of no further proof. But the line of psychic demarcation cannot be made to coincide with race cleavage in a single phase of intellectual, moral or spiritual aptitude. The difference of attainment is readily accounted for by what Benjamin Kidd calls social efficiency, or the discipline of civilization. We cannot predicate superiority or inferiority except as a transient phase of human development.

There is little room to doubt that the feeling against the negro is of the nature of inspirited animosity rather than natural antipathy, and can be accounted for, in large part, by the erstwhile status which he has occupied in the social scheme. A people who have yet made no considerable contribution to the general culture of the human spirit, and whose traditional relation with European civilization has been of a servile sort, are naturally enough not deemed eligible to the ennobling circle of Aryan fellowship. The violent severance of servile bonds, and the humiliation of the southern man's tough Teutonic spirit by outside compulsion, engendered deep and long-abiding animosities.

But the chief cause of race estrangement is of a political nature, if we be allowed to use that term, not merely in the technical sense of statecraft, but as comprehending the calculated policy of the ruling class toward the despised element. The cultivation of class consciousness is one of the most familiar phenomena of history. The line of demarcation is drawn at any easily discernible difference, whether it be geographical, racial, natural, political, religious, or minor distinctions of a physical or psychical nature. History is largely concerned with the conflict of

antithetic classes. The struggle between Greek and Barbarian, Jew and Gentile, Christian and Mohammedan, Catholic and Protestant, Norman and Saxon, is but prototype of the conflict which now wages about the color line. Evil disposition combined with shrewdly calculated design can always stir up class friction. Two friendly baseball teams can easily be wrought up to a pitch of murderous fury against each other. The yellow press of this country can, within a few months, involve the United States in war with a nation with whom we are now on the closest terms of international friendship. A heterogeneous population, where the elements are, on any account, easily distinguishable, furnishes an easy prey for the promoter of strife. The fuse is already prepared for the spark. The peace and tranquility of such a community depends upon the highest enlightenment and moral restraint in the leadership of the separable elements.

That the dominant South is determined to foster artificial barriers between the races is clearly seen in the utterances and action of its leaders. It was Henry W. Grady who laid down the platform: "We believe that there is an instinct ineradicable and positive which keeps the races apart. We add in perfect frankness, however, that if the South had any reasonable doubt of its existence it would, by every means in its power, so strengthen the race prejudice that it would do the work and hold the stubbornness and strength of instinct." The more recent leadership of the South, without the clear discernment and conscientious restraint of the brilliant Georgian, has seized upon this suggestion for sinister and selfish ends. They have harped upon the chord of race prejudice as a musician upon his favorite instrument. Seemingly dubious of the sufficiency of natural antipathy, they have sought to give it the requisite strength and stubbornness. The fire of

race hatred has been fanned until it has become an uncontrollable flame. Sociologists tell us that the collective soul is less sensitive than the conscience of the individual. It responds to the shibboleths and slogans whose refrain is malice and strife. The soul of the mob is stirred by the suggestion of hatred and slaughter, as a famished beast at the smell of blood. Hatred is a great social dynamic, the ever handy instrument of the unscrupulous demagogue. The rabble responds so much more easily to an appeal to passion than to reason. To wantonly stir up the fires of race antipathy is as execrable a deed as flaunting a red rag in the face of a bull at a Summer's picnic, or of raising a false cry of "fire" in a crowded house. And yet this is just what the politician is doing in order to carry his crafty ends. He has raised the cry of "negro domination" when all the world knows that the negro is no more able to dominate the South than the babies in the cradle. But it serves its purpose by raising race animosity, which easily overrides all arguments based on tax, tariff or the relative value of silver and gold.

The cry of "negro rapist" has been skillfully and wilfully proclaimed. The most dastardly deeds of the most dastardly members of the human race, though perhaps not exceeding in number or heinousness like offences throughout the civilized world, have been exaggerated and advertised as the negro's peculiar trait. Every negro who has suffered violence at the hands of a bloodthirsty mob has been held up to the world as being lynched for a nameless crime, when the plain facts of record show that not one such lynching in four can plead even the allevation of rape in extenuation. But of what avail is fact or statistics against the cry of "negro brute?" When the cry of "mad dog" is raised, no induction of fact can arouse sympathy for the cruel

usage heaped upon the canine thus branded. The end is served when the cry is raised.

But when all other devices have failed, "social equality" is relied on as the last appeal to give stubbornness and strength to race prejudice. But it is a dangerous thing to evoke the evil spirit. It will turn again and rend him who called it forth. The South, itself, and indeed the whole American people must be the eventual sufferers by the carnival of cruelty and crime evoked by these cunningly contrived epithets.

"America must be all white or all mulatto" is the motto and motive of "The Leopard's Spots," the most evilly potential book of this generation. The large question of race amalgamation is too complex for parenthetical treatment in this discussion. But it is sufficient to say that blending of the races is less likely to take place, if the dignity, self-respect, and manly opportunity of the negro are encouraged and respected, than if he is forever crushed beneath the level of his faculties for fancied dread of "social equality." The only way to foster race pride which in turn leads to the preservation of race type and race integrity, is to open up vista and scope to the black man's aspiration. How can one be expected to be proud to be a negro, if the American people, of set policy, fix the status of the race on par with that of the beast of burden? The inexorable decree of "social equality" is every day defeating its own purpose. Hundreds of mixed bloods are daily crossing the color line, and carrying with them so much of the despised blood as an albicant skin can conceal without betrayal. The man or woman who denies, ignores, or affects to scorn the class with which he previously affiliated is generally deemed deficient in the nobler qualities of human nature. It is not conceivable that any of this class would undergo the degradation of character and humiliation of soul neces-

sary to cross the great social "divide," unless it be in order to escape for themselves and for their descendants an odious and despised status. Inter-marriages usually take place among the lower stratum of both races. The refined and cultivated class among the colored people show as much distaste for such alliances as the whites themselves. Frederick Douglass materially affected his hold upon the affection of the colored race, especially the cultivated womanhood, by his second marriage. Degradation of the negro would lead soonest to the destruction of type and final blending of race through illicitness. Had slavery continued for another century, without fresh African importation, there would scarcely have remained an unbleached negro in America. The best possible illustration that a cultivated sense of self-respect does not lead to intermarriage is furnished by Oberlin college in Ohio, and Berea college in Kentucky. These institutions have had thousands of students of both races, males and females, associating on terms of personal respect and good will; and yet, in all these years, there has not occurred a single case of miscegenation. Contrast this record with the concubinage of the southern plantation or the illicit relations of the city slums, and it becomes at once apparent where the real danger of race mixture lies.

The observation of Mr. Dixon is a little late in the making. Whence comes this white blood that flows, with greater or less spissitude, in the veins of some six out of eight millions of negroes? Is it due to the bleaching breath of Saxon civilization? Who brought about the present approachment between the races? The strenuous advocacy of race purity in face of proved proneness for miscegenation affords a striking reminder of the lines of Hudibras: "The self-same thing they do abhor, one way, and long another for."

The charge that the educated negro is

in quest of social affiliation with the whites is absurdly untrue. His sense of self-respect effectively forbids forcing himself upon any unwelcome association. Household intercourse and domestic familiarity are essentially questions of personal privilege. The choice of one's friends and intimate associates is the most delicate phase of the pursuit of happiness. Such matters are regulated wholly by personal preference and affinity of taste. The social integrity of the white race is within its own keeping. The social citadel is not subject to assault and battery. The aphorism of Emerson is as true of races as of individuals: "No man can come near me except through my own act."

The negro is building up his own society based upon character, culture and the nice amenities of life, and can find ample social satisfaction within the limits of his own race. President Eliot of Harvard university has told us in a recent utterance that the white man of the North is not less averse than his southern brother to the social mingling of the races. The negro, too, has social sensibilities. He will never complain against any white man, North or South, because he is not invited to dine at his table, sit in his pew or dance with his daughter. But the negro ought not to be expected to accept that interpretation of "social equality" which would rob him of political and civil rights, as well as of educational and industrial opportunity.

For the negro to supinely surrender his status of political and civic equality would be as unmanly as a silly insistence upon unwelcome social relations would be unmannerly. The negro and the white man in this country must live together for all time which we can foresee. They must mingle in business and in public life. All their relations should be characterized by mutual respect, courtesy and good will. In all purely personal and social matters let each, if he will, go unto his own company.

